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Headline news for busy church editors

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KEEPING YOU ■ POSTED ■

The UCC Office of Communication:
“Connecting the Gospel and Justice to Media, Churches and Community”

February 1997

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

WHERE THE HEART IS – The gifts were modest in comparison to the need to rebuild burned African-American churches in the United States. It was where the \$266.75 came from that counted: \$200 from the Botswana Christian Council, \$13.50 from a women's group in the Zimbabwe United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and \$320 from Theological Education by Extension in Zambia.

These gifts are "very, very precious because of what they say in terms of relationship and partnership," says Dan Hoffman, Africa area executive of the Common Global Ministries Board of the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

CAN I QUOTE YOU? – “Women remain so categorically ‘No Name’ throughout the world that rape, domestic violence and genital mutilation can continue over centuries and be considered normal conditions.”

*— The Rev. Mary Susan Gast,
Northern California Nevada Conference
Minister and former Executive Director,
UCC Coordinating Center for Women,
as quoted in Common Lot*

AN EASTER STORY – UCC missionary Alan McCain vividly remembers Easter services in a refugee camp on the Turkish/Iraqi border.

Father Saliba, a Syrian Orthodox priest, first baptized a couple of babies according to the ancient rite, naked and howling. Then he celebrated a full Easter Mass in Arabic and Aramaic. The refugees had little but the clothes they fled in and meager camp food for a paschal feast. At a later Protestant service in English, a choir from four African nations let fly with everything they knew, including a stirring rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic." A Pentecostal preacher from Ghana then took 45 minutes to introduce McCain as the celebrant, necessitating a drastically shortened sermon. An Orthodox hospital administrator and an Anglican doctor served communion.

"And there," writes McCain, "on that Easter Sunday, the freest expression of the resurrection, the most joyful affirmation that a risen Christ has broken the shackles of death, poured blessing upon blessing upon me. Nobody fussed about what to wear to church, or whether the lilies were properly arranged; they wore the only clothes they had, and there were no lilies at all. Shining, radiant faces of people in literal captivity, set free by Jesus Christ. Worship was real. Christ was present, and I felt such power and such grace as I had never known before."

Happy Easter!

– From “*Bridge: a forum on Christian-Muslim relations*,” published by the Middle East office, Common Global Ministries Board, UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

THE BURMESE CONNECTION – Burma doesn't get much attention in the American press. That's tragic, because Myanmar, as the country is now called by the military dictatorship in power, is sliding into chaos.

Civil and personal liberties have been sharply curtailed and the country's last democratically elected prime minister has never been allowed to take office. Now, the international religious community is trying to muster attention through a world day of prayer for the Burmese on Sunday, March 16. The sponsoring Church of Christ in Thailand is asking Christians everywhere to "pray for the emergence of a free, just, democratic and open society" along with political and religious freedom and an end to the civil war.

The Common Global Ministries Board of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) support the day of prayer.

Churches wanting worship materials and other background information can call Betty Tankersley at the Board's Southern Asia office in New York, (212) 870-2838.

WHERE IS HEAVEN? – Kids can ask some pretty tough theological questions. One youngster at Tolt Congregational UCC, Carnation, Wash., wanted to know where heaven was and what it was like. We liked pastor Jeff Spencer's answer.

"Heaven is a name we give to being in God's presence," said Spencer. "So, when you feel really close to God, you are in heaven. And if you love God, after you die, you will really be close to God, and that will be heaven."

Jeff confessed it was difficult to point out exactly where heaven was. "Maybe heaven is everywhere God is, so heaven is everywhere," he said. "I believe it is full of love and happiness and joy and peace."

FOOTBALL CHRISTIANITY – Is this your church?

- *Quarterback Sneak*: People who exit following the choir anthem.
- *Draft Choice*: Selection of a seat near the door.
- *Draw Play*: What many children (and a few adults) do with the bulletin.
- *Bench Warmer*: Those whose only participation is their attendance Sunday mornings.
- *Backfield in Motion*: Making two or three trips out of the church during the sermon.
- *Stay in the Pocket*: What happens to a lot of money that should go towards missions.
- *Sudden Death*: The minister who preaches longer than 15 minutes.
- *Blitz*: Stampede for the door after the service.

– *Thanks to Rev. Chris Anderson, Heidelberg UCC, York, Pa., as quoted on Ecunet*

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TOP 10 REASONS YOUNG ADULTS DON'T ATTEND CHURCH –

10. Twenty-somethings do not enjoy being called kids!
9. The church wants future leaders ... but we are leaders now.
8. Old liturgical language and slow hymns in the morning put us to sleep.
7. Being called a cute boy/girl is not a compliment to a 22-year-old with an \$18,000 school loan.
6. Jesus Christ preached peace; the church raises money.
5. We are searching for meaningful relationships; the church thinks we hug teddy bears.
4. An 18-year-old is not the same as a 24-year-old, is not the same as a 30-year-old.
3. We want to worship God and serve the poor ... instead we are assigned to lead the youth group pizza party.
2. We want serious conversations, not fair linens and gilded chalices.
1. The Episcopal Church does not really welcome young single people.

Hmm! Could we substitute the UCC in #1?

– *From Julia Easley, Episcopal campus minister, University of Iowa, as quoted in Crossroads, publication of the Central Region of the UCC New York Conference*

WINTER SNOWS BRING FINANCIAL WOES – Winter storms, like the terrible ones of 1996 now being repeated in 1997, cause great hardship and suffering. Churches suffer too. Attendance drops off, with a corresponding drop in giving. But churches have ongoing expenses no matter what the weather – indeed, some extraordinary ones: food delivery to shut-ins, emergency fuel and clothing, repairs to storm-damaged buildings.

Be prepared for winter storms, and remember your church by putting aside your regular offerings if you cannot attend worship due to the weather. And for you snow birds in Florida, remember with a gift your frozen church friends at home.

– *Thanks to Communitas, publication of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference*

FROM DEATH, HOPE – First the soldiers shot his mother, then his grandmother, followed by two younger siblings. In a final act of brutality, they bayoneted to death a baby sister.

All of this carnage was watched by 5-year-old Edwin, a Guatemalan boy whose village was overrun by government troops during that country's savage civil war. Today, 14 years after that atrocity, Edwin stands on the brink of graduation from high school, the first in his family. He will go back to his village as a teacher.

Edwin might never have gotten his break if it hadn't been for scholarship aid extended by the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Some of that money comes from One Great Hour of Sharing. Gifts from OGHS reach around the world to touch the lives of thousands of people in need. Every day. Every year. Indeed, every year since 1949.

This year, the suggested Sunday for the One Great Hour of Sharing offering is March 9.